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Sent: Sun 1/26/2014 7:03:28 PM
Subject: EDF blog post: "Epic fail" in West Virginia chemical spill: Poor information, poor communications, poor decisions

<http://blogs.edf.org/health/>

"Epic fail" in West Virginia chemical spill: Poor information, poor communications, poor decisions

By [Richard Denison](#) | [Bio](#) | Published: January 26, 2014

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Little more than two weeks after the January 9, 2014, spill of multiple chemicals into West Virginia's Elk River, it's becoming increasingly clear that the private and public sectors at all levels failed miserably with regard to protecting the public's health. There is plenty of blame to go around.

Our focus in [the blogging we've done](#) about this terrible incident has been and remains on the lack of reliable information available on the chemicals involved in the spill, the failure to promptly share what was available with the public, and the shaky science upon which decisions and public communications as to the critical safety questions were based. In this post, I revisit several aspects of the initial and ongoing information gaps to add some additional perspective.

I discuss in some detail below two major problems that I believe demand close examination in the Chemical Safety Board's and others' investigations into the causes and consequences of the spill:

1. State and federal officials appear to have initially relied on Eastman Chemical Company's incomplete and out-of-date Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) on "crude MCHM," and as a result sowed confusion from the outset that has led to widespread public mistrust.
2. Those same officials appear to have accepted without scrutiny the adequacy, accuracy and relevance of Eastman's additional toxicity studies of MCHM, based only on *summaries* of those studies when they were finally provided by Eastman.

I end by briefly describing some of the implications of this tragic incident that need to be addressed going forward.

One caveat: Because information on this incident has emerged in a piecemeal and haphazard manner, I cannot vouch for the accuracy of every detail provided in this post. I have strived to the best of my ability to accurately describe the sequence and nature of events based on the available information. [Read More »](#)

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